

## **Review of Instructor Competencies: Standards for Face-to-Face, Online & Blended Settings**

Written by James D. Klein, J. Michael Spector, Barbara Grabowski, & Ileana de la Teja

Book review appeared in *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 53(4), 2005

Reviewed by Marcie J. Bober  
San Diego State University

Technological advancements have changed the face of training - and how it is developed; facilitated or delivered; and assessed for quality, usefulness, and impact. An array of software solutions ensures trainees can engage with others (whether or not geographically co-located), access resources on demand, and work on activities or submit assignments at their convenience. Such applications speed the development process as well, in effect, automating tasks that at one time were both costly and time-consuming to perform and called for the designer to have expert knowledge of the learning process.

But technological advancements have not necessarily improved the interventions we, as designers, design and implement. An obsession with just in time solutions means we often short-change or completely skirt underlying theory or principles; we tend to provide answers without first ensuring that learners' questions are valid and reasonable. Canned formats and templates let us "streamline" the instructional process and reduce "wasteful" problem solving. Instructional designers believe engaged learners are busy learners, and so, with little regard to their instructive relevance, they infuse their designs with a dizzying array of media and tasks. With time a precious commodity, designers argue that instructional effectiveness can, in fact, be gleaned by measuring trainee "satisfaction."

It is with this somewhat jaundiced view of the field that I reviewed *Instructor Competencies: Standards for Face-to-Face, Online, and Blending Settings*. Although the notion of instructor competence seems to run counter to the changes in instructional design processes noted just above, Klein, Spector, Grabowski, and de la Teja clearly feel otherwise.

### *Setting the Stage*

*Instructor Competencies* is a fresh look at the competencies promoted by the International Board of Standards for Training, Performance, and Instruction (ibstpi) - which broadly represents today's work-force sectors (academia, nonprofit, corporate, government);

ibstpi establishes concrete but reasonable sets of standards that can improve the capacity of individuals and organizations focused on training, instruction, and learning and performance improvement (see: <http://www.ibstp.org/>).

Ibstpi's instructor competences were first published in 1993, and mainly addressed standards for trainers in conventional (i.e., face-to-face) classroom settings. They formed the basis of many train-the-trainer and/or trainer certification programs. The revised standards reflect the variety of settings in which today's instructors work, as well as emerging ideas about the art and science of teaching itself. *Instructor Competencies* was written after the revised standards had been rigorously validated; the authors' stated purpose is to illustrate their viability to performance professionals struggling with professional development, selection and hiring, performance appraisal, and certification decisions (p.2).

That said, *Instructor Competencies* seems most appropriate for instructional design novices - a required text in a beginning instructional design or performance technology course, workshop, or seminar. An instructional design or professional development consultant focused on instructional strategies and techniques, learner support, and instructor-facilitator selection might also find it a useful reference.

### *A Review of the Content*

In Chapter 1, Klein et al. provide the interested reader with foundational information, specifically, how others over time have conceptualized the knowledge, skills, and attitudes associated with the competent or effective instructor. From there, they present the several factors that spurred a fresh look at the old standards; to wit, a changing (and more global) economy, emerging learning paradigms, and innovative tools that increase learning options. This section is far more than a sentimental scan of the past; rather, the reader is reminded that many core competencies of the past are still valid and fresh today, for example: the ability to communicate (and establish credibility) with learners; assess the learner "landscape" and make incremental adjustments; support learners with constructive feedback and encourage performance excellence; and plan intentionally, not generically.

Chapter 2 is a cogent overview of the ibstpi competency development model - a critical read for those who struggle with what distinguishes competence from skill, acumen, ability, and talent. The flowchart on p. 15 illustrates the model's complexity - its iterative phrases, its core components (domains, competencies, performance statements), and its clear focus on the many

roles that instructors play. But what brings the model to life is the authors' attention to its underlying assumptions about learning itself and the instructor's powerful influence on how learning unfolds.

Chapter 3 is a complete list of the instructor competencies and performance statements, organized in outline format by domain: professional foundations, planning and preparation, instructional methods and strategies, assessment and evaluation, and management.

Chapter 4 is the heart of the matter. The authors restate the domain-organized list of Chapter 3, but with additional narrative that carefully details how the performances associated with each competence unfold in today's most common instructional settings (face-to-face, blended, and online). The tone and language are accessible; I found myself nodding in recognition at the tips, techniques, and strategies that the authors showcase.

Chapter 5 targets the training professional who wants to assure that the standards "speak" to his or her needs. Klein et al. offer a two-prong presentation to tackle usefulness and relevance.

First, they tackle how the standards appeal to those in different capacities (instructors, training managers, instructional designers, evaluators, personnel managers, and academics). For example, a training manager is likely to review the competencies with professional development in mind, while an instructor is more interested in improving personal performance.

Next, the authors look at applicability by functional group, for example, training departments, personnel departments, train-the-trainer programs, learning organization programs, and university programs. Human resource or personnel departments are interested in selection criteria for hiring, and are likely to review the competencies in that light, while training departments are concerned with the impact of individual instructor on overall department performance.

Chapter 6 is about validation of the standards, and depicting the robustness of the process. Klein et al. describe the practitioner materials and academic literature that informed the revisions themselves, and provide easy-to-read tables that allow the reader to readily compare the old and new standards by nature or type: no change, minor change, expanded concept, new competency, and elevated to the domain level. The rest of the chapter focuses on the worldwide validation study itself. Although organized in traditional journal format, the language is that of the practitioner, not the academic. Even those who care little for empirical research will appreciate the care with which ibstpi staff selected subjects and participants, designed and deployed the survey, analyzed and reported the data, and acted on the results.

### *Ancillary Sections*

The sections that precede the main text provide important context, in essence, preparing the reader for what lies ahead. The foreword, for example, explains why the book is important and how the reader can act on the information it contains, while the preface confirms how critical instructors are to the learning process by briefly noting the many roles they play today (facilitator, coach, mentor, critic, and stage crew).

Browsing the appendixes is a must as well. Appendix A allows the reader to easily compare the revised standards with those promoted just a dozen years ago. Appendix B reminds the reader that even the most technically competent instructors can fall victim to ethical lapses, for example, by choosing to teach in settings where they lack content experience, sidestepping confidentiality and privacy, falling victim to bias and stereotypic thinking about learners, being careless about accuracy, and neglecting to support learners through feedback and other forms of guidance. Appendix C (coupled with the References section) prompts the interested reader to learn more. Finally, Appendix D offers useful, if scant, definitions of relevant learning terms.

---

Marcie J. Bober [bober@mail.sdu.edu] is Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Technology at San Diego State University.